

Habits

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Kurt had lost his third round of pool to Logan when Lee Forrester walked into the room. "Hey guys, what's up?"

Immediately Kurt released his pool stick and walked over to Lee, slowly circling her. "I don't believe it. No, absolutely I cannot believe it. Look at this, Logan."

"Look at _what?_" Lee put her hands on her hips and favored Kurt with her best mock glare. "You got a problem there, Wagner?"

Kurt looked at her with a carefully constructed expression of bewilderment. "Did you have surgery? It's healed remarkably well, I must say."

Logan came over and looked her over. "Give, elf. What's up?"

Wearing the same expression of bewilderment, Kurt turned to Logan. "There's no Magneto attached to her hip. Is this healthy?"

"I'll show _you_ healthy," Lee growled. "Logan. Gimme one of those pool cues."

Logan tossed her the cue, and she brandished it menacingly as Kurt backed off. "Ach, no. You wouldn't hurt a man who's blue, would

you?"

"'Attached at the hip.' I'll attach this pool cue to you someplace you won't like, Wagner."

"You wouldn't do that. I'm furry and adorable. Look, look at me looking adorable. You couldn't hurt this face, could you?"

Lee laughed and dropped the pool cue. "Has it really been that bad?"

"Let's put it this way. Some rude individuals whose names we shall not mention have suggested that you might be wearing metallic underwear."

"Uh-huh. And you don't want to mention their names because...?"

"I take the Fifth."

"I gotta admit it," Logan said. "Can't figure out whether it's you following him around or him following you but whatever it is, I've seen the two of you apart for maybe three hours total since we last fought the Beyonder and the two of you started living here. Doesn't seem like your style, Lee. You were a lot more hands-off with Cyke."

"Scott was not secretly convinced that if I walk around a corner I'll vanish into mist," Lee said sardonically. "Give the man a break, okay? This is his first real relationship since he decided he wanted to conquer the world. So he's a little overly affectionate."

"So where is he right now?" Kurt asked.

"Arguing with Professor Xavier." She rolled her eyes.

Kurt tensed slightly. "Not a serious argument, I hope?"

"Last I heard, they were on the existence or nonexistence of God. Which ought to hold them for a while. Although if they ever do run out of stuff to argue about, I'm sure they'll just switch sides and go back to an old topic." She shook her head. "I swear I've never seen people so in love with the sound of their own voices."

"The Professor isn't a well man. Logan, do you think we should--?"

"Naah. I've heard 'em at it before. Lee's right-- they're just having fun." He shrugged. "It's been years since Chuck and Maggie've been able to argue without someone threatening to kill someone else. I guess they've got a lot of arguing to catch up on."

"Which brings me to my reason for being here. Is there anywhere around here a girl can grab a few beers, let her hair down, swear like a sailor, and mostly act like a rude, crude fisherwoman and not someone's idea of the ideal sophisticated lady?"

"Trouble in paradise?" Logan asked.

Lee snorted. "Living with that man is many things, most of them wonderful, but 'paradise' is not a word I would use to describe

it." She shook her head. "Logan, he thinks I'm _fragile._ He thinks I'm a _lady_. I don't think anyone ever explained to him that 'fishing boat captain' means 'sailor.' He looks at me in horror when I say 'fuck.'"

"_I'm_ looking at you in horror," Kurt said. "Lee, you always struck me as such a delicate, gentle flower. I didn't know you even knew the word 'fuck.'" He managed to mostly remain deadpan through the sentence, only cracking up at the end when Lee gave him a look.

"I know a few places around here like that," Logan said. "Could show you there... for a price, o'course."

"Yeah, I know you take bribes. How about I pick up the tab for the beer?"

"Hey, if you're buying, we're there already."

"Is this a private party?" Kurt asked.

"Uh-uh. I want to surround myself with people who knew me from back when I was dating Scott and _not_ getting sore feet from standing on a pedestal all day. This is an open invite-- as many X-Men as want to come along, invite 'em."

"And you're picking up the tab for all of us? Generous woman," Logan said.

Lee laughed. "It's Magnus' money."

"In that case, I'm gettin' the expensive brews."

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The New Mutants would not have been invited along if they had been present, but as it happened, they weren't anyway. They had all gone out to New York City to shop, along with Rachel, who was desperately trying to pretend to be normal in the wake of recent events with the Beyonder and the Columbia University students who'd tried to kill Xavier and Kitty. Peter and Rogue, however, were enthusiastic enough about spending Magneto's money on beer at Harry's, both being just barely legal.

Kitty, despite being nonlegal by anyone's definition, was invited as well. "Lee's going stir-crazy," Logan told her. "She's invited us all to Harry's for brews. Figure, you could get a Coke and a sandwich if you want to come hang out."

"So who's left in the house?"

"Chuck and Maggie. Arguing about God. Or whatever they've gotten onto arguing about now."

Kitty grinned. "You know, if the mansion got attacked right now, we'd all be fighting and I'd bet they'd still be in there. And then if someone crashed through the wall, I could just see them both giving them that Look. 'Do you _mind?_ We are _trying_ to have a debate here.'"

"Yeah, probably. So, you coming or not?"

"Uh-uh." Kitty considered telling Logan what she planned. He'd understand, and probably sympathize. And probably tell her it was way too dangerous for her to do it. No, big ix-nay on telling him, then. She'd tell him about it afterward, if it worked and she didn't end up a French-fried Kitty. Maybe it wasn't brilliant to plan on doing this with Magneto still in the house, and no one else but a powerless and ill Prof X, but when else would everyone be gone? Besides, last time she'd taken on Magneto she hadn't the ninja training. She was fairly sure from her knowledge of physics that if she went through the floor and not him, fast, he wouldn't have time to electrocute her. Probably. And anyway, he was supposed to be one of the good guys now-- and after that stunt with Rachel, she was almost willing to trust him. Almost. Didn't change what she planned to do, but it meant she didn't really, truly think she'd find anything. Probably.

"Nope. Got work to do, sorry. I'll take a rain check on it, though."

He grinned. "I dunno if Lee's gonna be able to treat the whole team on Magneto's tab again anytime real soon."

Kitty grinned back. "Probably not, but it'd be fun to watch her try."

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She waited until the X-Men had all left for their rendezvous with Harry's. A quick check downstairs showed that Professor Xavier and Magneto were still debating, though now they seemed to have gotten onto free will, with Magneto, curiously, arguing that the insane were still responsible for their actions. Nail that coffin, Magneto. If Kitty had spent as long being arguably nuts as Magneto had, she wouldn't be nearly so eager to insist on the blame. On the other hand, Magneto was certainly willing enough to take the blame, now. "I am as feared as I am hated, and those I swore to protect are no better off... indeed, I have probably made their existence far worse."

Nice speech, she'd give him that. And she wanted to believe in him. It didn't make a lot of sense that an anti-human bigot would stop Ray from killing the human student who'd tried to kill Kitty. It didn't make a lot of sense that Magneto could fool the Professor, Logan and Rachel. But she couldn't take the chance. Heck, he could be on the level and still have stuff that he shouldn't have, stuff he was keeping secret. And Kitty was fairly uniquely qualified to check it out.

He and Lee'd been given one of the three-room suites on the same floor as the Professor's quarters. The door to the main room of the suite wasn't even locked-- made sense, since Lee would've been the last person to leave and she was among friends here. There wasn't much there-- a stack of books from Xavier's library on the coffee table, a sports magazine doing a feature on skiing on the couch, and a big floppy hat on the couch's back. The hat was probably Lee's, but Kitty had to control a snickering fit as she imagined Magneto in it.

Better than a bucket, anyway. She ducked into the larger of the two rooms, assuming it would be Magneto's. It wasn't locked either, and it was mostly as devoid of personality as the front room. A rumpled queen-size bed with the covers halfway torn off, a night table with a pair of dirty wine glasses on it, some women's cosmetics on the dresser in front of the mirror, a wooden hairbrush with stiff boar bristles enwrapped with long blond hair, a metal brush with metal bristles entangled with short white hair, and an empty bag of potato chips on the floor. Oh, and a terribly weatherbeaten suitcase propped in a corner. She tugged open a drawer and found herself in the Lost Graveyard of Nylon Stockings. Unless Magneto had some unusual tastes in clothing, this was Lee's stuff. The other drawers were either empty, or full of Lee's stuff too. This was clearly the room where they both slept, but Magneto's stuff must all be in the other room.

She phased into the other room through the wall. This was more like it. If she'd merely glanced in here first, she could have told it was Magneto's room. Of course, she couldn't have merely glanced in here without sticking her head through the door or wall, as the door was locked-- and that, too, could have tipped her off. Science journals from the library were stacked on the bed, which was neatly made and devoid of pillows-- the pillows, presumably, having migrated to Lee's room with him. There was a wrought-iron desk that most certainly was not a piece of furniture Kitty recognized, and a metal folding chair in front of it. The dresser in this room was covered with little metal figurines. Most of them were of people-- Kitty recognized Xavier, walking, and about six different versions of Lee, and didn't recognize any of the others. A few were more abstract-- infinity loops with Moebius bends in them, things that defied easy description. She opened the dresser drawers. Men's shirts, men's underwear, men's socks, mostly in unopened packages. There were open notebooks full of chicken scratch on the desk-- Kitty wondered if Magneto's handwriting was really as illegible as it looked, or if in fact he was employing an invented alphabet to further encode his work. Maybe she'd steal one and have Doug check it out. There was something that looked like half a robot, coming up about to her knee. The circuitry spilling out of it indicated it was incomplete, and its size indicated it was probably not a weapon, though Kitty determined to check it out thoroughly when it was done. It was in the middle of the room, hardly a secret location, so she didn't expect it to be a doomsday device or anything.

And there was a cabinet.

It looked like the sort of cabinet that had two doors you pulled open, except it didn't. It was really, in fact, a big rectangular metal box, about six and a half feet tall and two feet square around. There were no doors. Hinges for doors, it had that, but no doors to go with said hinges, so the front of the cabinet was held on by sets of hinges on either side, and couldn't move. There was no evidence that the thing could be opened at all. And it was hiding in a corner, half-hidden under a drapery-- not so obviously that anyone would think it suspicious, unless of course they came up here to see whatever Magneto might have to hide. Kitty inspected it carefully, moving the drapery aside to look for the doors. There weren't any.

A cabinet that only Magneto's power could open. Clever idea. But very few things could keep Kitty out just by not having a door. She reached her hand into the cabinet, phasing. A tingly feeling told her

she'd just disrupted an electromagnetic field. Damn, she hoped he wasn't storing a mini-mainframe in here. He'd nearly killed her for trashing his computers once. But it didn't feel like that. Slowly she started to solidify her fingertips, waiting for the pressure that would tell her she was in solid matter. She wasn't. With most of her arm solid, she determined that she was reaching into a shelf, exactly like she'd expect from the cabinet it looked like. She had no convenient little flashlight, so sticking her head inside would be pointless-- there'd be no light. Instead, Kitty waved her hand around inside, and encountered something squishy, something with a plastic feel to it, and soft underneath, but with a crunch, like the carapace of a giant insect. Or like biologicals of some kind in a sealed biohazard bag. Very careful not to phase into the bag, she grasped it, intent on uncovering whatever the hell Magneto was storing in there. There was no good reason for him to be storing biological specimens in a locked (and alarmed? Was that the tingly feeling she'd got? Maybe she should get out of here after retrieving her prize for Logan to look at) cabinet in his room in the X-Mansion. Kitty withdrew the squishy bag and her hand from the cabinet, and stepped back from the cabinet into the light from the window.

She was holding a bag of rye bread in her hand.

At that point the locked door to the room opened, and Magneto walked in.

"Katherine. I trust you have a very good explanation for this?"

Kitty found her voice. His expression was stormy, but not the psychotic rage she'd seen when he had tried to kill her. She took refuge in righteousness. "I didn't know if you might be pulling one over on the Professor or not. I came up here to see if there was anything suspicious in your rooms."

"And you have found nothing. So kindly put that down on the bed and be on your way."

She jerked a thumb at the cabinet. "What's in there, Magneto? You're hiding something, and it isn't rye bread."

"Why must I be hiding something?"

"Because nobody rigs up a cabinet with no doors and a silent electromagnetic alarm just to store their midnight munchies."

"Nobody?" He gestured. The cabinet opened, a seam appearing down the center, running from top to bottom, and turning into two doors, which swung open. Kitty blinked at the contents thus revealed. A jar of peanut butter, a bag of dried fruit, a hunk of cheddar cheese in plastic wrap, onion bagels, a box of Ritz crackers, a very small tub of cream cheese, a bag of dried beef strips, a large number of unopened tiny jam jars, one opened tiny jam jar, three apples, a pear, and assorted silverware, paper plates, etc. "You might wish to rephrase."

Kitty stared at the food in disbelief. "There's an alarm on the cabinet. I set it off by phasing through it, right?"

"Correct as far as it goes. If you'd done any physical damage to the cabinet, the alarm would also have gone off, as would any attempt to teleport the contents out."

"No one in the X-Men can teleport the contents of a cabinet they can't even see the inside of out!"

"I'm sure you're correct. You'd be more familiar with the team's capabilities than I. Now, is your curiosity sated?"

"Magneto--" She was at a loss for words. Kitty was never at a loss for words. Taking a deep breath, she mustered some up. "Why do you have an alarm system on a cabinet full of rye bread and peanut butter?"

"I don't see that that is your business, Katherine. Are you satisfied that I am not harboring dangerous weapons or secret doomsday plots in amidst my bagels? Surely your paranoia can only go so far."

"I'm not paranoid. It's perfectly reasonable that someone should have checked you out!"

"And you have. So, are you satisfied?"

"NO! I mean, yes, yes I'm satisfied that you don't have any supervillain doomsday devices in here or something, but... is there something I'm missing here? I don't get it. Why have you got an alarm system on a cabinet no one but you can even open if all you're storing is food?"

His face was flushed. He looked-- angry? No, she'd seen him angry. This wasn't quite it. Embarrassed, she realized suddenly. Irritated, and embarrassed. "As I said, it's none of your concern, or the X-Men's. So long as I'm not doing anything to endanger the team, or innocent lives, or the world at large, what business is it of yours what I store in my room?"

"Well... we get ants. It's not a good idea for people to have food in their rooms."

"The cabinet is proof against ants. While they can survive and even thrive in electromagnetic fields that would trouble more advanced life, I regularly conduct an electrical purge to exterminate any life that finds its way into the cabinet. Superheat metal to the red-hot range, and even the hardest ant will find it convenient to be elsewhere."

"Magneto-- why are you going to all that trouble? You know, if you're worried about people taking your food, you just do what Scott does and you put a sticker on it saying it's yours, and you can leave it in the kitchen. It's perfectly safe. No one's going to steal your stuff."

"I'm sure that's true. Now, are you done prying into things that don't concern you?"

His voice was harsh, and sharp, and suddenly Kitty realized how rude she was being. Magneto really wasn't under any obligation to tell her why he was hiding food in his room. It was one thing to get in a supervillain's face and be pushy and demanding, quite another to do

the same thing with someone who had more or less just joined the team, even if she still wasn't entirely sure she could trust him. As weirdly youngish as he might look in some lights, Magneto was an old guy, close to her grandfather's age, and old guys didn't much like it when pushy teenage girls made rude demands-- and he'd be within his rights not to like it. For what he'd done for Rachel, for his saving her life when Stryker's Purifiers were chasing her, she owed him a certain amount of respect, and she wasn't giving it right now.

"I'm sorry. I-- look, you're right. I've checked you out, and as near as I can tell, you're clean, and I'm not sorry I checked, but I am sorry I embarrassed you. I can be really pushy sometimes. I don't mean to be, it's just-- well, anyway, I'm sorry."

His face softened. "Apology accepted."

"Um, here's your bread back." She handed it toward him. He took it and put it back inside the cabinet.

"I can understand your suspicions. In your place, I'd share them. But, Katherine. What did you expect to accomplish? We and Charles are alone in the house, and Charles is lying down and powerless besides. You knew that your power would disrupt any alarms I had set, and alert me; you knew that I can seriously hurt or kill you; if I were hiding something of devastating nature in my rooms, plotting to destroy the X-Men from within or whatever you had believed, what made you think I'd balk at killing you should you have discovered whatever secret you expected to find?"

"I--" Now that he brought it up, it did seem stupid. She'd thought of it before, and dismissed the possibility. But why had she been checking on him at all if she'd been sure enough to stake her life on it? "I... guess... I didn't really think you'd kill me."

"Even after what happened?"

"That's... that's kind of why." She took a deep breath. "I... Ororo told me, when she was saying why she didn't try to stop you from escaping, why she didn't attack you after what you did to me... she said you were really broken up over having killed me. Or thinking you'd killed me, anyway. Because I was a kid."

"And you thought that that would work in your favor again?"

"Well, you saved me from the Purifiers. And that policeman-- he was human. And what you said to Rachel..."

"So what you are telling me is that at some level you weren't truly suspicious of me at all. If you truly thought I were the dread villain you feared, you wouldn't have been foolish enough to invade my room without anyone to back you up. At least-- I assume you have been an X-Man long enough not to make that mistake?"

She flushed. "I'm not totally stupid, Magneto. Even if it looks it, sometimes. I guess you must be right. I was... going on habit. You know-- be suspicious of you because you've always been dangerous, even if it doesn't make any sense to be. Even if I know better."

"As well you should have. Logan has, I believe, been through all my luggage with a fine-toothed comb. Did you think your friends such

fools that they would let me in simply on the word of a clearly ill man? Nor am I such a fool as to have anything of deadly nature in my possession. If I meant the X-Men harm, I would not enact that harm through some sort of device stored in my bedroom... if for no better reason than that Lee comes through here frequently."

Kitty sat down on the edge of the bed. "I guess that wasn't the most brilliant idea I've ever had, then," she said wanly.

"No. I'm concerned for you, child. If you're to be in a dangerous business like this, you need better understanding of your own instincts. If I were dangerous, you should not have come alone. If I were not dangerous, then what was the point to coming at all? It's all very well to be young and think of oneself as the great heroine who'll single-handedly root out the villain's devious plots, but in real life the villain could kill you. I could have killed you. There are times in my life when I would have, and thought nothing of it except that I'd disposed of a threat." His voice was quiet, and he was looking away, as if he were ashamed. Which, of course, he should be. "Give your trust wholly, or not at all."

"Well, then, I've gone and invaded your privacy and messed with your stuff for no good reason. I'm sorry." She looked at the carpet, kicking her heels against the bed.

"It's all right, Katherine. You've survived the mistake, and you won't make it again, I trust. And I know well how hard habits are to break." He sighed. "You will find, as you age, that you become more and more a slave to habit, and breaking with it becomes a near-Herculean task. Sometimes the habits are harmless enough that one simply doesn't even bother to try... and sometimes, they are devastating. To oneself, to others... to sanity, sometimes." He turned abruptly. "Where does your family come from?"

Kitty blinked. The sudden change of subject was almost as startling as the rye bread had been. "Chicago."

"Before that."

"Lemme think... my mom's folks have been here for forever, I think. They came from Germany originally, but it ws back in the 1800's or something, so they're about as American as you get. But my dad's parents came from Poland originally. They got out when things started getting ugly over there, just before the war. Why?"

"They were fortunate, then," Magneto said, a grim edge to his voice. "Your family are all Jews, I assume?"

Kitty frowned. People rarely said things like that unless it was preparatory to an anti-Semitic remark. Which didn't seem very in character for Magneto, with all his preaching about the horrors of human intolerance for mutants; on the other hand, his own capacity for intolerance, in the sense of prejudice against humans, was legendary. "Yeah, but what's that got to do with anything?"

"So the 'ugliness' your grandparents were escaping was the same one that caught me and mine," he said softly. "Have they told you anything of it? Of the heritage of pain you hold, as a Jew, particularly one who descends from a pair who barely got out of Poland in time?"

"My grandma never talked about it. She just wanted to remember happy things, nothing sad. But yes, my grandpa would talk about the Holocaust sometimes. He-- he wanted to go to the Holocaust Memorial, on the days of remembrance, to try to find out about what happened to some of his relatives." The implications of his statement sunk in.

"_You're_ Jewish?"

"You sound as if it is more difficult to believe this than to believe I store food in an alarmed cabinet."

"No offense, but... you don't look it. Or sound it. Or... well, heck, I wouldn't have guessed."

The chair slid out from under the desk, and Magneto sat himself in it, facing Kitty. "I am... not anything anymore. Except a mutant, and a man. I turned my back on my heritage when I turned my back on my humanity. And now that I am looking for my humanity, I am not sure where to go to find it. Except that being silent is not the way to do it."

Was he actually confiding in her? The situation just got stranger and stranger. "Um... well, I don't know if I can help with the humanity part, but I haven't been to temple in about three hundred years. If you wanted to go with me sometime..."

Magneto smiled. "Probably not. Even before I gave up my heritage, the religion itself... well, let us say I had a falling out with God some half a century ago, and He has not apologized sufficiently for my tastes for me to go back to His house as a suppliant."

"Oh." She considered. "Well... in light of what you just said about being silent and all... did you want to tell me why, or something?"

He stood up, and paced. "Did Charles or Ororo or Scott tell you anything of my background?"

"Well... no. When I last read the files on you, they said we didn't know where you came from. But that was way back when I first joined the X-Men."

"I am a little surprised, in light of the fact that you were key to my change of heart, that they didn't go out of their way to tell you. But I have sworn to be silent no longer, even if it is a terribly difficult habit to break, and I imagine some of the things I've said must have made no sense without this knowledge." He turned and looked at her. "My family were slaughtered by the Nazis. Some died before we ever set foot near the camps; others died at Auschwitz. I survived. I am fairly certain that I am the only one who did."

She remembered her grandfather talking about his sister Chava, who disappeared in the chaos of the Nazi occupation of Poland, and Grandpa had never learned her fate. She remembered her grandfather's friend Isaac, quietly telling her horror stories of another age, and Grandpa shouting at him, "She doesn't need to hear that! She's only a child, you'll give her nightmares!" and Isaac answering that it was better that she have nightmares now than that she grow up to see them come true. Kitty's heart wrenched, remembering the nightmares she had had, remembering her obsessive reading on the subject and the fear

she'd felt, as a child, that it could happen again. "God, I'm really sorry," she said, meaning it, and thinking the words sounded stupid as she said them. He wouldn't think she was sincere. He'd think she was just saying that, because the only words she had to express her sudden sense of kinship and sorrow for him were the rote words everyone used. "That's terrible."

He nodded, once. "You wished to know why I turned my back on God? That is why."

Then he shook his head, half-smiling, as if forcibly trying to throw off the somber mood on his face. "And, you wished to know why I store food in my room. We speak of habits, again. Since Auschwitz... I have never felt entirely secure without a supply of food that only I can get to, hoarded away." Magneto faced her, with an embarrassed half-smile of self-mockery. "I'm well aware that you X-Men will not steal my food, and that I could buy more if you did. I know I am a wealthy man, and one of the most powerful mutants on the planet, and the odds that I will ever go hungry again are next to nil. I know that if a situation should arise that I cannot simply go out and get more food, having a locked and alarmed cabinet will likely do me no good at all. I know all this... but it doesn't change matters. I keep the food as securely as my powers will allow, for no good reason, only habit."

"Like a security blanket," Kitty said, and regretted the analogy immediately, as the embarrassment on Magneto's face darkened from amusement to anger. "Sorry, I didn't mean that the way it sounded."

"I should hope not," he said sharply. "I do not enjoy being mocked."

"I wasn't making fun of you, honest. I just meant... it's something irrational, but harmless, that makes you feel better. There's no reason to be ashamed of that."

"I prefer not to be irrational, when I can avoid it."

"Well, I do too. But I sleep with a teddy bear," she said defiantly. "And if anyone made fun of me for it, I'd just laugh right back at them, that they're so small they've gotta make fun of me for something like that. Because if I'm doing something that doesn't hurt anyone, just to make myself feel better, no one has the right to tell me I'm wrong or stupid for doing it. Emotions are irrational things. Just ask Mr. Spock."

"Mr. who?"

"I can't believe you've never seen Star Trek."

"I haven't had an opportunity to sample much entertainment, over the past several years."

"Well, now that you're an X-Man, sort of, we've gotta make you watch Star Trek. -- Are you, anyway? An X-Man?"

"I don't honestly know." He sat down again. "Given my age and experience, it would seem a trifle absurd. On the other hand, I think I have managed to commit myself to Charles' dream, at least for the

moment. And 'commit myself' is probably the operative term... sometimes I think I must have gone mad, to even contemplate joining forces with you, to believe for a moment in something as optimistic and naive as Charles' dream... but I have tried not believing, and that accomplished nothing constructive. Perhaps believing can accomplish some good, after all."

"I like to think so." She stood up. "Why did you tell me about the food? I mean, if you were embarrassed to, you didn't have to."

"Lee points out to me that mutants and humans are not so different after all... that we have the same emotions, the same thoughts, the same needs. That, in a fundamental sense below any species divide, mutants are... only human." He looked up at her. "I have spent much of my life hiding from my humanity, concealing any weakness, however slight. From the fact that I hoard food in my chambers to the fact that I saw my family murdered by butchers when I was a boy, anything that I could construe as a weakness, I concealed. And it did no good. My objective was to seem more than human, above the common run of man... instead, I think I ended up looking less. A cardboard caricature of a man, an icon of Evil rather than the freedom fighter I thought myself. And I am tired of it. I think, perhaps, it's time I learned again how to be human... so I've sworn a vow to stop hiding, inasmuch as I can. If I can bring myself to speak of my weaknesses, perhaps I can make people understand why I believed what I did, why I did what I did, and why I have no plans to do it again. I can claim I have changed all I want, but no one will believe me unless I show them."

"So why did you ask me about my family?"

"I knew you yourself were Jewish. I wondered if you knew anything of the Holocaust, if you'd had any relatives who might have endured what I did. And in the end..." He shrugged slightly. "I don't know if my resolution to speak of things would alone have been enough to break the silence of so many years. But this is your heritage, your past. And, if the X-Men fail, your future, according to Rachel. What decided me was not only that I should speak, for my own sake, but that you deserved to know. My past is your history... and those who don't know history are condemned to see it repeated."

"Oh." Slowly she nodded. "That makes sense."

"Does your grandfather still plan to visit the Holocaust Memorial?"

"He's dead." The pain of that loss was still a sharp knife in the gut. She'd been on an X-Man mission when he'd actually passed away; she hadn't visited him in the hospital for a week before he'd died.

"I'm sorry. You hadn't said-- I didn't mean to cause you pain."

"It's all right. He was sick, and... and he hated it in the hospital, and he was ready to go. It's just..."

"It is just that you were not ready to have him go," Magneto said softly.

"Yeah. Like that." She wasn't going to cry in front of Magneto. She'd cried for Grandpa enough. Kitty took a deep breath. "I told him I'd go for him, when it didn't look like he was going to make it to the next ceremony."

"You're aware it's in a few weeks?"

"Yeah-- I have it down on my calendar. I didn't know if I was going to make it, though. With X-Men business, and the Beyonder being on Earth and all."

"The Beyonder doesn't appear to be causing a great deal of trouble, not yet at least. One needs to make time for the things that are important to one's personal life, Katherine. Else one becomes consumed with work, and that way lies madness. I know." He stood. "Would you like me to go with you?"

"You-- would you want to?"

"I went myself, last year. Right after I'd thought I'd killed you, just when I had begun to rethink my life. It was... painful, in several ways, but I think it was probably good for me. And I did meet an old friend I'd thought dead. I was considering going again this year in any case... not to look for anyone, necessarily, I've done my looking, but simply... as a remembrance. If you wished to have me, I would be glad to accompany you."

"You know... I think I'd like that. I was kind of nervous, about going there alone, but I know my folks wouldn't go... my dad's life is a mess right now and my mom doesn't want anything to do with my dad right now, or his family. And I could have asked one of the X-Men, but I'd feel kind of weird dragging them to a Jewish thing."

"Pain isn't exclusive to Jews. It is a ceremony of remembrance for the Jewish victims and survivors; the others who were consumed in the Holocaust have their own remembrances. But no one would think less of you for bringing gentile friends. That being said, however, feel free to invite any of them if they wish to go, but I will certainly go with you if you'd like."

"Yeah." She nodded. "I would like. Thanks, Magneto."

"You're entirely welcome, Katherine. Now, if I heard correctly, you do have work you need doing, have you not?"

In other words, I've bared my soul enough to you for one day; now go away. She grinned. Captain Forrester had an uphill road ahead of her, living with this guy. "Yup. So I'll quit being a pest. But just one thing, Magneto."

"Yes?"

"The X-Men call me Kitty. Not Katherine." She took his hand and shook it. "Welcome to the X-Men, Magneto. Hope you survive the experience."

He looked utterly nonplussed. Finally he smiled, recognizing that it was a joke at least, even if he didn't get it. "I'll endeavor to... Kitty."

She grinned at him, and phased through the floor. "Bye now!"

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"So did you manage to find stuff to do while I was gone?" Lee asked teasingly.

She'd found him working on one of his gadgets, utterly oblivious to the world. When he'd realized that she was back, he'd turned to look at her, his whole face lighting up as if he were a kid and she were his birthday present. She'd gone to him before he had a chance to stand up, hugging him and running her fingers through that beautiful thick hair of his, and then parking herself on his lap. Funny-- all that power, all that history of violence and megalomania and arrogant self-sufficiency, and he was still capable of being giddily, almost goofily affectionate, nuzzling his head against hers and nibbling at her neck as if she'd been gone for days instead of a few hours.

"The time dragged endlessly in your absence," he said sonorously, and for a moment she almost took him seriously-- Magnus was capable of being that pompous. Then he smiled. "No, I found things to do. Charles and I had much to discuss." For a moment a cloud passed over his face; then he shook it off. "And I had a very instructive conversation with Kitty Pryde."

"About what?"

"Rye bread, and bad habits." He wasn't going to say more than that, she knew. "And you? Did you enjoy your day with the X-Men?"

"It was great fun. We had a food fight at Harry's, guzzled beer, had belching contests-- you'd have hated it."

"It doesn't sound like my notion of fun, no. But so long as you enjoyed yourself, that's what matters."

"So it was a good day for both of us?"

"A good day. Yes, I think so."

She put both arms around his neck, to give her the leverage to pull herself up on his lap, and leaned in to a quarter inch in front of his face. "Wanna make it even better?"

"You are an utterly debauched woman, a hedonist and a terrible tease."

"And you love me for it."

"Well." He seemed to consider this. "Well, not for that alone, but yes. Yes, I think I do."

An unbearable sense of tenderness toward him suffused her. She kissed him then, before he could say anything to spoil or hedge the declaration.

It did get to be an even better day after that.

End
file.